

AN  
ADDRESS  
TO THE  
METHODIST PREACHERS,  
OCCASIONED BY THE  
TRIAL  
OF  
ALEXANDER KILHAM,

At the DISTRICTS in NEWCASTLE and SUNDERLAND,

In FEBRUARY and MAY, 1796.

*Honoured Fathers and Brethren.*

AS the religion of Christ teaches us to regard justice and truth above the censure or esteem of our fellow creatures—we make no apology for this Address.

When public characters are tried and condemned for actions which affect communities, it becomes the duty of the individuals, who constitute that community, to understand the nature of their crimes.

The claim of the London Preachers, and the proceedings of the districts, called upon those who were attached to the Methodists, to consider attentively the tendency of the publications which occasioned them, to enquire whether Mr Kilham deserved the censure or thanks of the Methodists? It was the London Letter which first led us carefully to examine his book, and consider it with the utmost impartiality we could.

Having minutely considered every page—and perhaps every paragraph, (previous to the publications which have appeared in consequence of the London Letter) we enquired into its general design—and secondly into its most exceptionable parts. We have hitherto buried our sentiments—but from a conviction of duty to him, to whom all is due, we now present them to you, Brethren, and entreat you to remember that the decisions of Conference on this subject are very interesting. The circumstances in which the Conference is placed, in deciding on Mr Kilham's case—are of a very peculiar nature.

Whatever aggravations may appear in his conduct—whatever are the laws of Methodism—the body of the Methodists—the whole of other religious communities—the nation at large—nay, myriads in America, and other quarters of the globe, connected with the conference, will not forget, that Mr Kilham's judges—are his accusers.—That the subjects he has brought forward are of a very complicated nature—that they require much patient in-

vestigation—that the decisions respecting him will tend to stamp an indelible character on a body of men, whose office is the most important in the world. Should impartiality, meekness of wisdom—strict and scrupulous attention to truth, zeal for the public good—forgiveness of injuries—appear the prominent features of those concerned, it will confirm that attachment which myriads bear to them.

Should resentment, bigotry, reserve, artifice, and prejudice, be manifest to the eyes of waiting millions, Mr Kilham has done no injury compared to such proceedings.

Considering ourselves as acting in his sight, before whom the creation is as a drop in the bucket, we forget that distance with which we, in general, look up to the body of men we now address. Considering his presence and will, we know of no sentiment we ought to suppress that will support his cause.

Hence, we speak without reserve—we rejoice to be made low, when it is for the exercise of a good conscience; and know we need no more firm support than his—who hath gone without the camp. Should we, therefore, have the appearance of presumption in this step, our motives may be manifest to all;—and, as we have already intimated, that we conceive every individual, attached to the Methodist Connection, called upon by the London Letter,—attentively to consider Mr Kilham's writings, and the consequent steps,—we subjoin a short extract of the reflections which occurred to us at a very early part of the business;—we say a short extract, because so much has been already said, respecting the work in general, that it appears a waste of time to do more than give a sketch of the principal things which are in question.

We, therefore, notice first its general design, viz. "To prevail with the Preachers every where to fix on such a constitution as shall unite us and our followers in such bonds as can never be broken." The public will naturally enquire how far Mr Kilham's book is calculated

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to answer this end? As the end avowed cannot be censured, it will be asked, is he culpable for supposing such a constitution wanting? For alledging proofs? for hinting a plan to effect it? As no one will say he should be blamed for any of these, it will follow, that if he has no facts to alledge in support of his hypothesis—if he has wilfully misrepresented any things, he ought to be considered as an enemy, not only to a religious community, but to truth and justice.—If, through mistake, he has misrepresented any subject;—(and who does not mistake?) if undesignedly, he has wounded the peace, and injured the character of any, he ought to be convinced, and apologize.

Let us review the charges he has made, and the facts he alledges in their support; let us examine the remedy suggested,—and see, if in any of these, he has justly incurred censure.

We briefly notice the general subjects, and wish Mr Kilham's pamphlet to be read with this enquiry—do these things exist amongst the Methodists? If they exist, are they evils which ought to be remedied?

For instance, 1st. Did the conference make the decrees alluded to, page 7. and mentioned p. 14.? Are these explicit or ambiguous?

2d. Do such rules as those mentioned, p. 15, 16, 17. exist amongst us? are they perfectly consistent with liberty of conscience?

3d. Have Assistants a power to act in the cases mentioned page 22. against the judgment of the Society? Are there no instances to be found to justify the assertions, that bad use has been made of such power?

If those who pass judgment in this matter can say, that the Connection are slandered by this representation, that these rules do not exist—that they have never been abused—let the Author of the Progress be treated as a malicious slanderer;—if not—he has in this part of the work done no more than faithfully point out the danger we are in? In this will it not be difficult to prove him an enemy either to Preachers or People?

If Mr Kilham is not blameable for pointing out disorders?—Is he for suggesting a remedy? Sure Methodists never will say the meanest of Manassah's tribe are too contemptible to attempt the public good;—but is not the plan he suggests dangerous? Examine it:

Members admitted and excluded—all public characters approved and appointed—all collections made and expended—all prudential matters determined;—not by individuals but the general voice.—Can his outlines be forced to mean more than this? If so—what is there here for which a Minister of Christ must be cast out? Has he spoken any thing, on these subjects, contrary to the Bible? Is there any part of this plan condemned by the head of the Church?

Shall he, therefore, be condemned for recommending what he believes a more excellent way? Whatever other parts of the publication may imply;—surely no charge can be founded on this;—Surely both Preachers and People will take heed to conform to "the law and the testimony."

But it is objected, "that there are very exceptionable parts in this Book—that under the pretext of pointing out existing evils and a remedy for them, Mr Kilham has

so represented facts, as to throw a general stigma on the body of Preachers, and asperse the characters of individuals.

To judge of this let every passage be fully examined.—Let the writer have the justice due to every criminal—and what construction can be put on all that he has said?

Will not impartial men see, that his general charges amount to this, 1. That in the government of so large a body evils arise. 2. That all hath not yet been done that might to prevent or remove them? 3. That facts exist which may be brought to prove these assertions?—Examine every page, and say on what subject these remarks are not applicable?

The facts are recited in justice to his cause: if he has not ground for them, his guilt bears a proportion to his intentional misrepresentation.—If he has ground, as we owe more to a whole Society than a part, Mr Kilham has shewn his disinterested love to his fellow creatures—by manifesting the Achans in the camp.

Nor does it appear that any of these facts are so coloured, as to imply an impeachment of the Conference in general.—We know of none that will not admit the explanation already given, if taken in Connection with various passages, in which he speaks most decidedly of the abhorrence which the Conference looks upon circumstances they cannot prevent, see page 13. 34. 43. *ibid* 49.

After these general remarks it must be allowed, that several passages are exceptionable, we shall mention them as they appear to us: Are not his insinuations, p. 2. respecting Mr Fish, and p. 3. on the circumstance of Whisky trivial? The partiality of conferences, p. 3. ungenerous? Is there not too much levity in the expressions, p. 17. "House of Commons, Lords, Popes?"

May not some think his publishing the conduct of a Preacher, p. 22. inconsistent with those principles of justice and mercy, which forbid our reproaching pardoned penitents?

However descriptive is not the language too ludicrous, p. 33. We observe on this and the charges, p. 43. and 44. they are only applicable to the individuals who are guilty, and shew the necessity of a better plan.

His remarks on the Preachers fund, p. 53. when striped of their violent language amount to this, 1. That some may receive from that subscription who are improper objects. 2. It holds forth a motive for some to travel longer than they ought. 3. That soliciting support for it under the pretext of its original design, when that is materially altered, is not acting with uprightness.

What part of this can be totally denied? Is not the money paid in proportion to the years a Preacher has travelled? Was this the original design? Is it not applied for to support worn out Preachers in necessity? May none be induced to travel longer from the hopes of increasing their annuity? Have we no Old Preachers but what have been active? Do all that receive want an addition of 30 or 40l. per year to their income? Is there nothing to be said on the necessities of Young Preachers and their families when disabled from their work? If these things can be totally denied Mr Kilham has slandered the Connection; but if they exist in ever so small a degree, and if he supposes the present mode of conducting the fund increases them, why should he be condemned for



for blaming the plan? It is true he has used very strong and sarcastical expressions;—expressions which to us, ill become the pen of a Minister of Jesus Christ.

He has not sufficiently guarded the subject—he has not noticed the reasons the Conference had to adopt the present plan—he has confounded the general benefits of the institution with its abuses. He has not sufficiently allowed the extreme difficulty public bodies are under in all cases of this nature;—hence inferences may be drawn against the designs of Conference which he never intended.

But where will be the equity and humanity—where the impartiality and tenderness of Christians to exclude a man for his zeal against corruption;—admitting it has carried him into intemperate language!

Our reflections on page 59. are very similar, we think them culpable; not because attempts to usurp an undue pre-eminence ought to be unnoticed:—but because,

1. He has treated distinguished characters with unbecoming ridicule, for merely attempting what he and others thought injurious to religion. 2. He has forgotten that they had any arguments to assign for their conduct. 3. He has betrayed a levity in treating sacred subjects, which, we apprehend is by far the most exceptionable part of his writings;—but on this we recollect the regard to truth and the happiness of men, apparent in their general tendency, calls upon us to hope the levity indulged in some instances, is less criminal in Mr Kilham than it would be in ourselves.

We have thus reviewed the principal subjects which appeared deserving notice in the progress of liberty.

As the most of these observations were made on the receipt of the London Letter it accounts for not noticing either Mr Kilham's "Candid examination," or "the Trial." Those who wish for a more numerous detail of the passages which have been objected, may see them in these publications.

If it be asked on what account is this imperfect sketch of the business printed? we observe:

1. Because when public characters are tried for actions which affect communities, it becomes the duty of the individuals who constitute that community to understand the nature of their crimes.

2. As this appears to comprize a fair view of the subject in its leading parts, the Preachers in general, who are concerned in the decision, may see in what light it has struck others previous to the general observations which have been made upon it.

3. To bear our unequivocal testimony that whatever may be the opinion of our Brethren, on a calm review of the general designs and most exceptionable parts of the progress, it is our decided judgment: 1. That the book contains no impeachment of the general designs of Conference.

2. That Mr Kilham is neither an open or secret enemy to the Preachers and People.

3. That his book is founded on facts, which are the same in themselves, whatever language is used to describe them.—Those are,—That in the government of an immense and hardly organized community evils exist.

That the heads of that community are so far blameable as they want attention to use the best means for removing these evils.

4. That though Mr Kilham may justly be censured for the manner in which he has treated several things, yet we dare not say "he has written a detestable book, containing most malicious expressions against the body of Preachers—a book replete with malice, pride, and audaciousness;" but that his integrity and zeal demand the confidence and thanks of those who are interested in the subjects.

Should the Authors of this be enquired for; they have only to observe, Mr Kilham has not the slightest knowledge of this step.—They seek no party.—They regard the truth.—They have ground to say they speak the language of thousands.

John Henry  
New Canaan  
City Canaan  
New Canaan